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WebTV deal realigns Microsoft plans

Mary Jo Foley, Charlotte Dunlap. Computer Reseller News.
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①MICROSOFT CORP.'S acquisition of WebTV Networks Inc. for \$425 million has shaken up ①Microsoft's own product plans, as well as those of its competitors.

At the same time, the deal is likely to create new opportunities for resellers in the Internet access arena, especially in the area of content creation, delivery and management.

Already, one high-profile, multimedia start-up company, VDOnet Corp., is in discussions with ①Microsoft and WebTV regarding using its video technology to enable video broadcast, the company said.

"They [①Microsoft and WebTV] are looking for compelling reasons for people to buy those [WebTV] boxes. We have a great user technology," said Marty Falaro, president and chief executive of Palo Alto, Calif.-based VDOnet.

The company also is participating in the Compaq Computer Corp.-①Intel Corp.-①Microsoft initiative that aims to line up leading hot applications, such as video, that are of interest to ISPs, and to work closely with those companies in engineering and marketing support.

The ①Microsoft-WebTV deal also has implications for JavaSoft Inc., which recently signed its own deal with WebTV, a deal that WebTV officials claimed will remain intact.

WebTV agreed to license Java on March 30, JavaSoft officials said. WebTV was expected to embed JavaSoft's newly announced Personal Java for networked products in its operating environment, which would be licensable by set-top box makers.

"We were the first licensee of Personal Java, and we will be continuing that development," said Phil Goldman, senior vice president of engineering at WebTV, during a press and analyst conference.

"We are very committed to Personal Java and making that deliverable," he

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said.

But industry watchers were skeptical of WebTV's ability, as a Microsoft subsidiary, to work with Personal Java, especially since Microsoft and WebTV are expected to integrate Microsoft's Windows CE and Internet Explorer with WebTV's client and server software as soon as possible.

Microsoft also announced that it will add new code called the Windows Broadcast Architecture to Memphis and NT 5.0 to enable PCs to receive video and digital data from existing satellite, cable and terrestrial sources.

The effect that this addition will have on two products that are, at latest count, not expected to be delivered until 1998, is uncertain.

Microsoft said WebTV will operate as a subsidiary of Microsoft and retain its offices in Palo Alto, Calif. Founder Steve Perlman will continue as head of WebTV, reporting to Microsoft Senior Vice President Craig Mundie.

On the standards front, Microsoft proposed the use of the existing television vertical blanking interval (VBI) to send data to PCs and other digital devices. This would allow IP data packets to be broadcast over existing terrestrial broadcast networks via the IP Multicast protocol, which Microsoft recently submitted to the Internet Engineering Task Force as a proposed standard.

Companies backing the VBI proposal included CyberSource Inc., Hitachi Ltd., Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp., Tseng Labs Inc. and WavePhore Inc.



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